

Peat ban: evidence & data

May 2023

UK environmental horticulture is essential to millions of gardeners, communities, the environment and the economy

- 30 million UK gardeners & 30% UK's urban areas are domestic gardens¹.
- 81% adults believe gardens & green spaces mental health benefits².
- 89% adults believe gardens & green spaces helps support wildlife³.
- 90% adults believe gardens & green spaces make an area pleasant⁴.
- UK horticulture incl growers, retailers, manufacturers and landscapers.

The sector supports a peat-free future with current horticultural peat-use at a historic-low⁵

- 3 million hectares of peatland in the UK⁶.
- Just 1200 hectares or 0.04% are extracted for horticulture (even less now)⁷. All extraction comes with restoration commitments post-completion.
- Peat by volume in growing media has halved since 2020. 2022: 24% total UK growing media by volume was peat (43% professional, 17% amateur).
- Many large retail groups and multi-site centres have committed to peat-free compost now or will shortly, with many offering peat-free plants too⁸.
- Horticulture underwrites 50% of the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan⁹.

2030 vs 2026 ban: Risks UK's ability to meet tree & carbon targets¹⁰

- UK commercial plant and tree growers are likely to be able to produce around 100 million fewer plants and trees for the 2027 season than at present if the ban on peat-use in commercial plant and tree production is brought forward from 2030 to 2026
- 278k tonnes of CO₂e would be saved by bringing the ban on peat use forward to 2026 from 2030, roughly equivalent to the carbon dioxide absorbed by half a million trees or 11 million small shrubs over their lifetimes. UK needs a 3-fold increase to meet tree-planting targets, which are 90-120 million trees per annum, 7500 hectares per year by 2025.
- 33% growers will not be able to supply amenity or forestry contracts if 2026 peat-ban¹¹. It takes 2-5 years to grow a tree ready for sale.
- The CO₂e saving of bringing the ban forward is the equivalent of around half a million trees or 11 million small shrubs, which is what one or two UK growers would supply each year.
- Bringing the ban forward from 2030 to 2026 is likely to result in a shortfall of around 100 million plants and trees in just the year after the ban comes into force, with further shortages each year to 2030

Key facts: the sector

674,000 JOBS
£28.8BN GDP & £6.3BN TAX
95% SMES

IF A 2026 BAN, 9% UK GROWERS WILL CLOSE THEIR BUSINESS

Key facts: peat-use

2022: 24% TOTAL UK GROWING MEDIA BY VOLUME WAS PEAT

3 MILLION UK PEATLAND HECTARES, JUST 1200 ARE FOR HORTICULTURE

Key facts: trees

33% GROWERS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SUPPLY AMENITY OR FORESTRY CONTRACTS IF 2026 BAN

DEFRA VALUES UK TREES NATURAL CAPITAL AT £151BN

¹ <https://hta.org.uk/policy/unlocking-green-growth>

² YouGov for HTA, October 2022

³ YouGov for HTA, October 2022

⁴ YouGov for HTA, October 2022

⁵ <https://hta.org.uk/news-events-current-issues/news/headline-figures-from-new-report-show-a-significant-decline-in-peat-usage-in-uk-horticulture>

⁶ <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Peatland%20factsheet.pdf>

⁷ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/soils-and-peatlands/endingtheretailsaleofpeatinhorticulture/results/endingtheretailsaleofpeatinhorticultureinenglandandwales.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-go-peat-free>

⁹ <https://hta.org.uk/news-events-current-issues/sustainability>

¹⁰ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tree-planting-in-England-Summary.pdf>

¹¹ HTA survey, April 2023

2030 vs 2026 ban: UK growers will reduce production and jobs

- UK ornamentals growers are valued by Defra at £1.6bn per annum, HTA modelling estimates an annual production loss valued at 10% per annum or £160mn as well as employment that this supports.
- HTA estimates that if output from commercial plant growers fell by 10-15% in 2027, then pro-rata UK growers may see nearly 3,000 job losses, and this doesn't take into account any jobs lost in garden retailers or parks and landscape maintenance services as a result of there being fewer plants and trees to sell or maintain

Key facts: growers

37% GROWERS WILL REDUCE PRODUCTION & JOBS IF 2026 BAN

Key facts: plants

4000 PLANT SPECIES AVAILABLE TO UK GARDENERS

49% GROWERS WILL BE FORCED TO REDUCE RANGE IF 2026 BAN

77% RETAILERS WILL LOSE RANGE IF 2026 BAN

RESULTING IN 13% FINISHED PLANT SHORTFALL AND 75% HOUSEPLANT SHORTFALL AT RETAIL

Key facts: costs

33% INCREASE IN GM COSTS TO GROWERS OF SWITCHING TO PEAT-FREE

ALTERNATIVES REQUIRE NEW AND DIFFERENT MACHINERY & INFRASTRUCTURE C£500K-£2M PER FACILITY

Key facts: seasons

2026 DATE MORE THAN HALVES GROWING SEASONS AVAILABLE TO TRIAL

66% OF BUSINESSES WILL INCREASE THEIR WATER USE FOR PEAT-FREE

2022 SUMMER TEMPERATURES OVER 40C

2030 vs 2026 ban: UK plant rationing, cost increases and reduced choice

- The removal of peat from professional horticulture at the end of 2026 is likely to result in severe supply chain shortages of plants and trees.
- There are up to 4000 plant species available for UK gardens and gardeners¹².
- 2/3 of UK adults visited a garden centre in 2022¹³.
- UK retailers and growers import a value of around £400mn plants and plant products from overseas, predominantly from Europe. Some retail businesses buy over 50% of their finished plant material from the EU.
- The UK horticultural industry is well ahead of other countries on becoming peat-free, but other countries supplying UK are not ready for 2026.
- In October 2022, 43% of UK adults said they had bought an indoor plant in the last year¹⁴. HTA research estimates that UK consumers spent over £500 million on indoor plants in the last year. Defra's horticulture statistics report the production value of imported indoor plants as £148mn in 2021.
- Majority of houseplants are not peat-free.
- 29% retailers will likely need to ration plants if 2026 ban date.

The availability of peat alternatives of consistent quality and price

- UK growing media is majority wood-fibre. Coir, bark and green compost, alongside peat, are the other main components.
- Many alternatives such as coir and bark are imported from abroad.
- Major concern on the consistent supply of high-quality alternatives for 2026.
- Recent reports of inflation in the horticultural sector revealed that energy prices (+165%), fertiliser (+40%), transport (+28%), packaging (+23%) and plant/raw materials (+20%) experienced the highest price increases from Autumn 2021 to 2022¹⁵.

Seasonality, climatic changes, different irrigation and nutrition requirement challenges

- Horticulture is dependent on water to grow. We estimate that garden retailers and ornamental plant growers use around 20 million cubic metres of water a year, mostly on irrigation. It is just 0.2% total UK use but is critical.
- Two-thirds (66%) of growers say they are likely to need to use more water to irrigate plants grown without peat.
- Growers and retailers share concerns over increased wastage with reduced trial seasons.

¹² RHS House of Lords Horticulture Inquiry submission April 2023

¹³ YouGov for HTA, October 2022

¹⁴ YouGov for HTA, October 2022

¹⁵ <https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/promar-report-the-real-impact-of-cost-pressures-on-the-horticulture-sector/>